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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000237

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STATE FOR EAP/FO AND EAP/ANP
NSC FOR VICTOR CHA
OSD FOR ISD/JESSICA POWERS
PHNOM PENH FOR POL/MCKEAN
PACOM FOR JO1E/J2/J233/J5/SJFHQ

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NZ](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND PLEASED WITH PIF MEETING OUTCOMES

REF: A. PORT MORESBY 99

[1](#)B. WELLINGTON 229

Classified By: Charge David J. Keegan,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The GNZ believes the March 16 Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Foreign Ministers meeting offered Fiji's interim government clear carrots and sticks for a return to democratic elections within 18-24 months, as recommended by the PIF Eminent Persons Group (EPG). New Zealand was very pleased by the PIF Ministers' unity, which the GNZ say was strengthened by the Ministers' negative reaction to FM Nailatikau's denial of Fijian military human rights abuses. Australia and New Zealand have offered significant financial and technical assistance to Fiji if it agrees to accelerated elections, contingent on continued cooperation from the GOF. PIC missions in Suva will work with the interim Fiji Government to discuss what is needed to hold elections in [1](#)2008. This information will be fed back to the EPG, which will deliver another report in three months. GNZ officials concede the Solomons, PNG, Tonga, and Samoa especially will need to keep unified pressure on Bainimarama and others to convince the interim government to accept this approach. The GNZ also admits that it will be necessary to offer Bainimarama an exit strategy, but says it is useless to explore this until the GOF shows a willingness to sign onto the PIF's elections roadmap. End Summary.

Meeting Goes to ANZ Plan

[1](#)2. (C) Alan Williams, the Deputy Secretary of Foreign Affairs charged with Pacific Island issues, told the Charge and PolCouns that the PIF meeting was an "Australia-New Zealand diplomatic success story," that laid out clear carrots and sticks for Fiji's return to democratic elections as early as 2008. The GNZ was very pleased as well by the PIF Foreign Ministers' unity in delivering a strong message to Fiji, as before the meeting it had seemed that the Solomons and Tonga especially would not come on board.

[1](#)3. (C) In the end, neither Fiji nor the Solomons participated in the drafting of the final communique, although they had been invited to do so. New Zealand and Australia convinced the others to accept a number of firm recommendations. When for example Tonga and Kiribati were reluctant to "condemn" the coup, New Zealand persuaded them to agree to reiterate the December EPG's original statement expressing "profound concern" about the coup. Williams said that FMs Peters and Downer had

also engaged in crafty negotiating tactics to get the other Ministers to support a relatively short time frame for Fiji's return to elections.

The FMs argued that because Fiji's constitution requires that any changes to electoral districts be approved by elected Ministers, Fiji should hold elections immediately. In reality, Peters and Downer made this case so that the other Ministers would not split the difference between the EPG's recommended 18-24 month time frame and the GOF's claims that it will take 3-5 years before Fiji is ready to return to the ballot box. The final statement affirmed "the EPG's recommendation that the interim government should commit to a firm timetable for national elections...within 18 months and 2 years, if not sooner."

14. (C) As Williams describes it, Fiji's presentation to Ministers was both conciliatory and recalcitrant. Interim FM Nailatikau started out with an eloquent and plausible explanation of "Fiji's distinctive approach to a return to democracy." Had he left it there, he may have carried the day. But the interim FM soon lost whatever sympathy he'd gained by delivering a second presentation message that included a diatribe against Australia's alleged plans to invade Fiji and a complete denial of any RFDF human rights abuses. Williams said he could tell from the Ministers' body language that they were uncomfortable with this harder message. He added that Nailatikau's misstep probably increased the Ministers' resolve to press the interim government for an early return to democracy.

Next Steps

15. (C) Australia and New Zealand have offered significant financial and technical assistance to Fiji if it agrees to accelerated elections. Williams said New Zealand might even be willing to help with Fiji's anti-corruption investigations. Any assistance will be staged so that

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it is contingent on continued cooperation from the GOF. The PIF Ministers tasked ANZ and PIC missions in Suva to work with the interim Fiji Government to discuss what is needed to hold elections in 2008. This information will be fed back to the EPG, which will deliver another report in three months. Williams said the GNZ will monitor the missions progress weekly in order to gauge Fiji's response. NZ officials also hope that additional pressure will be placed on the interim government through the EU's review of its development assistance to Fiji under the EU's Cotonou Agreement with former European colonies. The EU is set to meet later this month with the interim government, and the review could result in a permanent removal of European assistance to Fiji's sugar producers if the GOF does not accede to return to democracy. According to the GNZ, the EU will reportedly draw heavily on the EPG report in making its determination.

16. (C) Williams said that the GNZ has pointed out to Fiji that the timetables the interim government put in its own report to the PIF are far longer than necessary, and many actions that the interim government say must be sequential can in fact be carried out simultaneously. The Fijian timetables raise the question of how much Bainimarama feels he needs to delay elections for his own safety, said Williams, who admitted that in the end Bainimarama will likely only agree to elections if he is given immunity. But it's too early to discuss how this would happen. Williams said the PIF needs to see which Fiji it is dealing with -- contrite or recalcitrant -- before deciding how to handle Bainimarama's exit from the scene. While he was justifiably pleased with the results of the meeting, Williams also conceded that Tonga, PNG, Samoa, and the Solomons especially will need to maintain continued unity of purpose, strong advocacy, and the right "tonality" to persuade Bainimarama and other senior interim officials that they have many reasons to accept the PIF electoral roadmap.

Including Fiji in Regional Discussions

17. (C) Williams reminded us that the GNZ sanctions allow bilateral discussions with the interim government related to Fiji's return to democracy. He said he and others in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade were pushing for GNZ to allow GOF participation in regional meetings covering topics of regional interest, such as fisheries, the

Pacific Plan, and energy issues. Australia is undergoing a similar debate, said Williams, who added that the GNZ would be interested in learning how we intend to handle Fiji's participation in the Pacific Island Leaders Conference and other venues. We agreed to keep in touch on this.

Keegan